

Why did they applaud? Why did Republicans and Democrats applaud? Because we had all voted for it because we all believed in a person's right to vote.

You know, I am the only Democrat ever elected to the U.S. Senate from the State of Vermont, and I remember my first two elections which were quite close. Ninety percent—I would say approximately 90 percent of the election machinery, those who count the ballots and whatnot, were controlled by Republicans.

But I had faith in getting through because I knew two things: One, they could count and, two, they were totally honest.

And I am sure—especially in the vote in my first election, for the vast majority who voted for my opponent, an honorable person, they were happy to have counted the ballots, and the State said where the ballots were. And there was even a recount in my second election, it was so close.

And I remember one of the Republican auditing groups sent out a fundraiser, saying we have to fight the Democratic-controlled election machinery of Vermont. And I reminded them that the "election machinery" was 250 town clerks, 80 to 90 percent of whom were Republicans.

And I say again: They can count, and they are honest.

We are fortunate in our State that we encourage everybody to vote. And I remember when the Senators of the other party and the Judiciary Committee said: Well, you want—you want to change the rules so that Democrats would win.

I said: We want, nationally, the kind of rules we follow in Vermont. And, by the way, in last year's election, we elected a Republican Governor and a Democratic Lieutenant Governor. Why? Because our rules do not favor one party over the other. Our rules favor one thing—the right to vote. And we insist on that in our State of Vermont, but we should insist on that throughout the country.

It should not be a case where somebody can be blocked from voting because the voting booths and the places for them are changed so that some communities would have a harder time or a more difficult time to come there or hours change. No. We should be fighting.

If we want America to be the strong, great Nation that we all claim it is and we all believe it is and we all want it to be, it can only be if we say make sure everybody gets to vote—everybody. I don't care whom they are voting for, make sure everybody can vote.

Because what happens when people are blocked from voting and voting drops off, people lose faith in their government. If we lose faith in our government, we lose faith in our country. And if we lose faith in our country, this wonderful experiment in democracy—as some called it a couple hundred years ago—fails.

We can't have that. We can't have that. So I look back on my 48 years here in the Senate, and I think it is not the title; it is not the chairmanships; it is not the President pro tem; it is not being dean of the Senate that I cherish, it is knowing that I can vote. I can vote. I have voted 17,000 times, more than that now.

Can I go back over all those votes and find some where I might think, "Gee, I should have voted differently," of course, I can, but I voted. I can vote. And I call on my colleagues, vote up or down. I would hope that all of us would do as we have in the past, when I have been in the Senate, when we passed the Voting Rights Act 98 to zero. Republican Presidents were signing the Voting Rights Act. Let's go back to that time.

Vote any way you want in a Presidential election. Vote any way you want in gubernatorial, congressional, in local elections, but in this body, this body, which should be the conscience of the Nation, vote to uphold the right to vote, vote to allow every American the ability to vote.

Don't hide behind procedure. Stand on the floor, have the courage and the honesty to say: I am going to vote to allow people to vote or I am going to vote not to allow people to vote. But stand here and say what you are going to do. The last time, 98 of us stood here and voted. We wanted everybody to vote. Republicans and Democrats, we joined together.

Wouldn't that send a wonderful signal to a fractured nation if we did that today and stood up and said: We are going to vote. We are all going to vote. We are going to vote yes or no, but we are going to let people of our State know how we voted. We are going to let the American people know how we voted and say why we voted.

I would wish we voted as we did before to say to all Americans, Republicans, Democrats, Independents, any part of this country: We want you to vote. We will urge you to vote the way we would like, but we want you to have the ability to vote, even if you are voting for our opponents or for a different point of view.

The most important thing, as Americans, as U.S. Senators, is to say we stand for the right of people to vote—every one of us, every single one of us.

I will have more to say on this matter later.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Hawaii.

VOTING RIGHTS

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, yesterday, we celebrated Martin Luther King, Jr., Day and honored civil rights leaders who fought against inequality and sacrificed so much to move our country closer towards justice for all. But this year, on a day when we should be coming together to commemorate these civil rights achievements and recommit to the road ahead, we are instead fighting a battle we thought was won decades ago.

In 1957, Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his "Give Us the Ballot" address, where he said:

The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic tradition.

But here we are in 2022 fighting back against hundreds of bills introduced in States across the Nation clearly intended to make it so much harder for certain people to vote.

Twenty-two States have already enacted 47 new laws that make it more difficult to vote by mail, that make it harder to stay on voting lists, that limit the availability of drop boxes for ballots, that limit the number of polling locations, that impose stricter or newer voter ID requirements, and the list goes on. But one of the most insidious is Georgia's law which allows any person to challenge the rights of an unlimited number of voters to cast their ballots.

If someone decides for whatever reason to challenge another person's right to vote, the voter then has to show up to their election office to defend themselves. Imagine being a single mom working two jobs and unable to afford childcare, and now she has to defend her constitutional right just because someone thought she shouldn't be voting at all.

Volunteers are already being recruited to pose these challenges. This isn't voter protection; this is vigilantism. These laws are clearly intended to target communities of color and make it harder for them to vote, period.

Our country's legacy of racial discrimination in voting is undeniable, and it is undeniable that we are witnessing history repeat itself.

In 1890, the House passed historic legislation that would have increased voting protections, particularly for Black voters, but the Senate failed to take up this legislation, failed to act at a critical time when it had the chance, and the results were devastating for decades to come. The Senate's failure to take up this legislation allowed Jim Crow and the plummeting of voter

turnout among Black voters to continue for more than half a century, until the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 over 70 years later.

A recent Washington Post analysis said that this current wave of voter suppression bills potentially amounts to “the most sweeping contraction of ballot access in the United States since the end of Reconstruction.”

Today, these attacks on our freedom to vote are taking us back to the time of Reconstruction.

We cannot wait another 70 years for this so-called deliberative body to act, which is why we need to pass comprehensive voter protection legislation. But not a single Republican supports the Freedom to Vote: John Lewis Act. Many of my Republican colleagues have joined Congressman John Lewis to commemorate the March from Selma to Montgomery, but today they won't even allow the Senate to consider legislation named in his honor and have called this bill radical. There is nothing radical about protecting a person's freedom to vote. What is radical is sending us back to the days of Reconstruction.

This legislation would restore and strengthen the Voting Rights Act, which Congress reauthorized with broad bipartisan support five times—1970, 1975, 1982, 1992—and it passed 98 to 0 in 2006, which included 10 currently sitting Senate Republicans.

This bill would also expand opportunities to vote, prevent voter suppression, and improve election security. We are talking about provisions that would require States to offer early voting and no-excuse vote-by-mail, make election day a public holiday, crack down on voter intimidation, and require postelection audits. Again, I ask, how is any of this radical? What is radical is justifying overt attacks on our democracy by perpetuating the Big Lie of mass voter fraud.

For Republicans, this fight isn't about election security; it is about securing their power, because Republicans have decided that spreading misinformation and rigging elections by preventing people from voting is the only way they will retain their power.

Republicans should come to the Senate floor and tell the American people why they won't protect our freedom to vote. Instead, the Republican leader came to the floor to attack Democrats for fighting to change Senate rules to pass this critical legislation, calling it a power grab.

The Republican leader said that Democrats want to “permanently damage this institution.” He went on to say the filibuster is “about compromise and moderation”—this from the Republican leader who refers to himself as the grim reaper as he prevents dozens of House-passed bills from being considered on the Senate floor; the same person who singlehandedly prevented President Obama from filling a vacancy on the Supreme Court

for over a year, denying the will of nearly 66 million Americans who voted to give President Obama a second term in office; the same person who pushed through President Trump's Supreme Court nominee as over 159 million Americans were in the process of voting. So much for compromise and moderation.

Let's not pretend this is about the sanctity of this institution. We cannot sit back and let one political party continue to unravel the threads of our democracy one voter suppression bill at a time. While Republicans do nothing to protect our freedom to vote in the face of mass voter suppression bills enacted across the country, we Democrats cannot sit back and let 2020 be the last free and fair election in our country.

If we don't protect the right to vote, we won't have a democracy. It is that simple. That is the reality. Since the Republicans will not lift a finger to protect voting rights, we have no option but to change the Senate rules in order to pass the Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act. This is something that every single Democratic Senator needs to get on board with.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, late last week, our Democratic colleagues briefly paused their quest to destroy the Senate's 60-vote threshold just long enough to use the 60-vote threshold themselves to block a bill.

Republicans supported sanctioning the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline that would give Russia even more leverage to bully Europe. Most of our Democratic colleagues bowed to the furious lobbying from the Biden administration to protect Putin's pipeline. There were 55 votes to pass the bill that our friends, like Ukrainian President Zelensky, desperately wanted passed, but Democrats blocked it by denying 60.

Now, many of these same colleagues have spent weeks thundering—literally thundering—that the Senate's 60-vote threshold is an offensive tool of obstruction, a Jim Crow relic, declaring that simple majorities should always get their way. Ah, but late last week, they literally wielded the 60-vote threshold themselves—a useful reminder of just how fake—fake—the hysteria has been.

We already knew Washington Democrats didn't have any principled opposition to Senate rules. Democrats repeatedly filibustered the CARES Act in March of 2020, while insisting on changes. Democrats filibustered and killed Senator TIM SCOTT's police reform bill.

You only have to go back a few years to read vigorous defenses of the filibuster from our Democratic colleagues and their allies.

The Democratic whip, Senator DURBIN, put it this way:

We need to protect the right of debate in the Senate, preserve checks and balances so that no one party can do whatever it wants. We need to preserve the voice of the minority in America.

DICK DURBIN.

The Democratic leader himself said in 2017 that we need to “find a way to build a firewall around the legislative filibuster”—build a firewall around the legislative filibuster.

Then, in a letter that same year by 32 Senate Democrats, our colleagues demanded—demanded—that the 60-vote threshold stay right where it was.

Until the last couple of years, Senators on both sides have understood the Senate is not here to rubberstamp massive changes by thin majorities. This institution exists to do exactly the opposite—to make sure major laws receive major buy-in and have major staying power, and, historically, Democratic allies outside this Chamber have recognized this as well.

Let's go back about 15 years ago when Republicans controlled the Senate. A leftwing organization called The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights published a lengthy statement defending—defending—the filibuster, including—listen to this—its relationship to civil rights.

Here is what they had to say when Republicans were in the majority here in the Senate:

On behalf of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil and human rights coalition, with more than 180 member organizations, we urge you to oppose—

oppose—

any efforts to eliminate the 216-year-old filibuster in the United States Senate.

That is a coalition of 180 member organizations called The Civil and Human Rights Coalition.

They went on.

The elimination of the rights of the minority as embodied by the filibuster is contrary to the founding fathers' vision of the Senate as a body of equals designed to protect against the tyranny of the majority.

This statement continued.

The civil rights community has recognized and accepted the value—

The value—

of the filibuster even when it frustrated efforts to advance civil rights legislative goals. During the 1950's and 1960's, countless civil rights bills were filibustered. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not passed until it survived 75 days of the longest filibuster in history and the Senate voted 71-29 to end debate and finally passed the bill. This legislation was enacted because of long, hard work